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AS A
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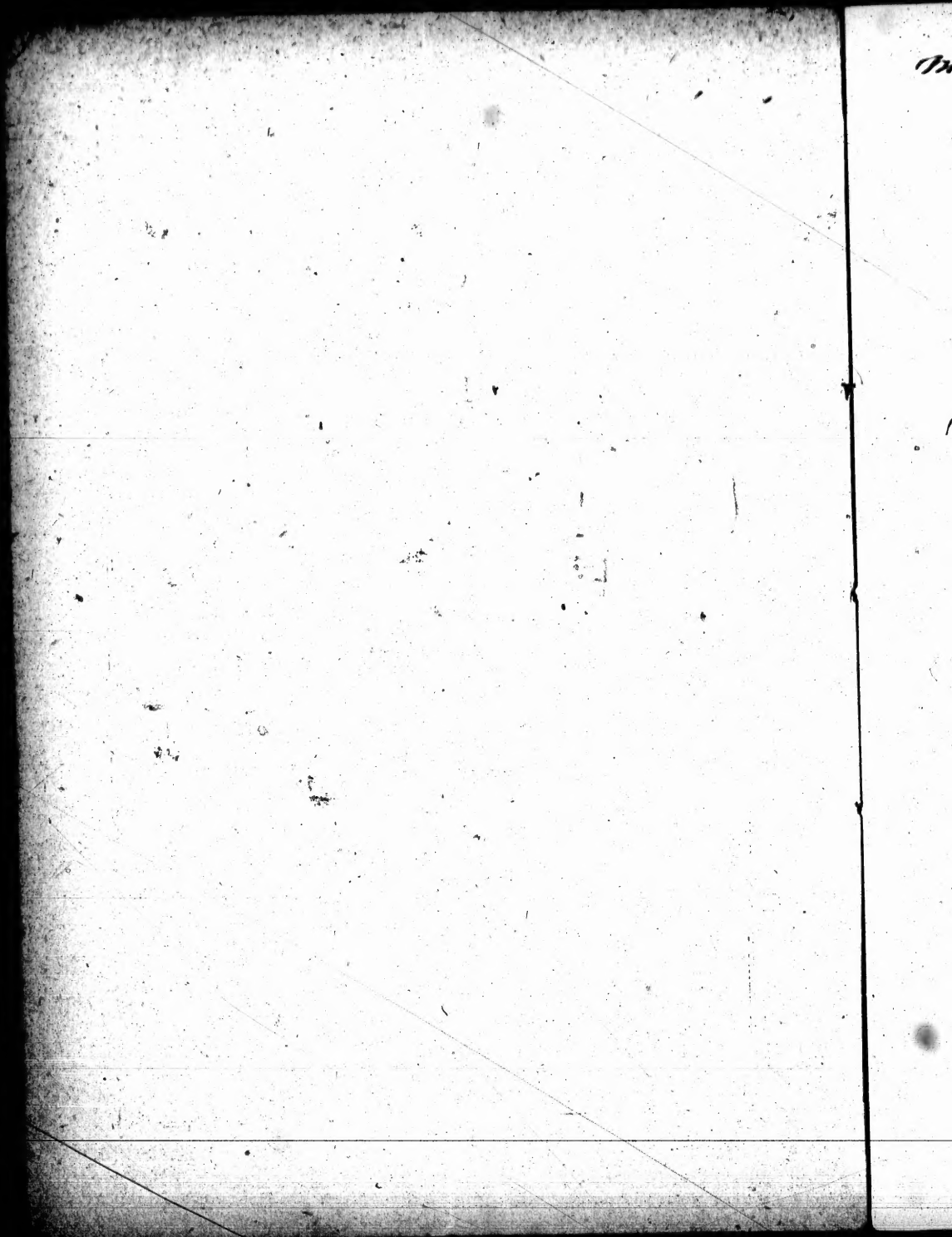
A PAPER READ BEFORE THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE OF THE ARCHDEACONRY OF YORK, IN
ST. JAMES' SCHOOL HOUSE, TORONTO.

BY
JOHN WILSON, M.A.
Archdeacon of Peterborough.

(Printed for private circulation only.)

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1885.



*The Right Reverend
The Lord Bishop of Toronto.*

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With the Bishop's last Remarks.
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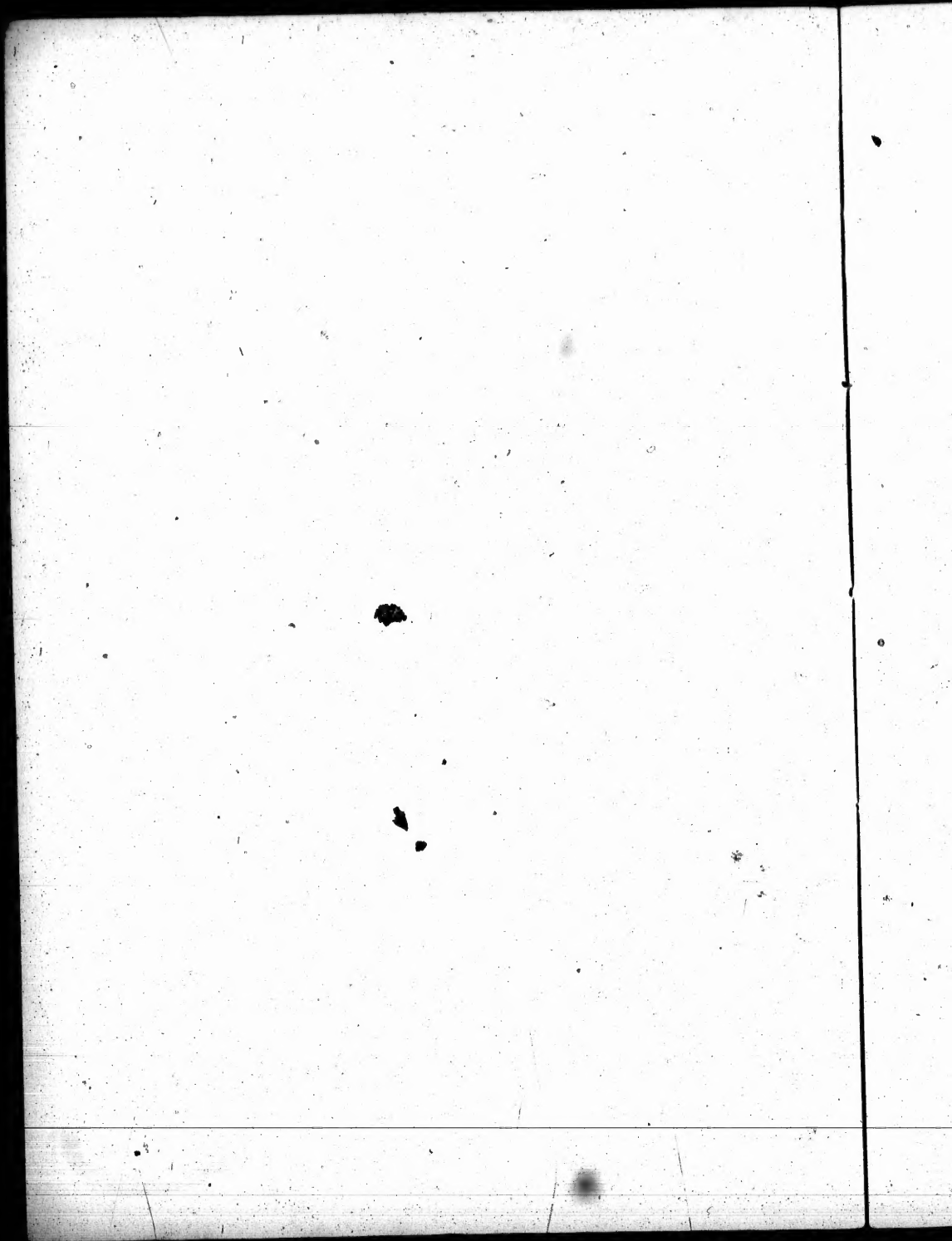
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THE VALUE OF THE PULPIT.

IN the following paper the writer has endeavoured to put together a few hints and observations, which, by leading to subsequent discussion, may elicit more important information, such as may prove useful to some of the younger Clergy, in their public ministrations. At the same time, he presumes not to dictate to his brethren in the ministry, to whose zealous and faithful labours he can bear humble testimony ; but desires rather to act the part of a friend and fellow helper, as one conscious of his own infirmities, and feeling the awful responsibilities of the ministerial office.

The grand design of preaching the Gospel is, to bring sinners to the Saviour, to win souls to Christ, in order to restore fallen and guilty man to that state of holiness and happiness from which Adam, by transgression, fell. The *fall* of man, and his *recovery* through Christ, lie at the foundation of all true religion, and should be constantly enforced and explained by the Christian ministerⁿ in his exhortations and addresses. In this respect, the *Pulpit* affords him a most excellent opportunity of setting forth the whole scheme of Redemption, as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. For this purpose the Bible should be his

constant study. To it he must repair, as to an inexhaustible fountain of divine truth, for the subject matter of his discourses. Christ Jesus, the Lord, in His threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King, should be the *subject* of all his preaching; and the salvation of sinners the *object* of his addresses. The glorious work of redeeming love, the love of God in sending His Blessed Son into the world to save sinners, should ever be in his heart, and pervade all his teaching. The great doctrine of the Atonement; the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for the sins of the world; His pure and spotless example for our imitation; His intercession for His people; and His continual presence with His Church; these are the themes upon which the Christian minister will delight to dwell; this the preaching which will be most likely to affect the hearts of his hearers, and win souls to Christ.

Next to the study of the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the early Christian Fathers should also engage his attention, and after that, the standard Divines of our own Church will supply him with abundant materials which, if judiciously used, may prove of great benefit to him in his preparation for the Pulpit. The faithful minister, in his pastoral intercourse with his people, will also meet with many incidents, in the passing occurrences of the day, which he may improve, and turn to good account, in his public ministrations. He will thus become a Scribe well instructed in the word of God, and be enabled to

bring forth out of his treasure things new and old. He should, also, himself be impressed with the value and importance of the message he has to deliver, or else he will fail to make any impression upon the hearts of his people.

When we consider that the minister is the ambassador of Christ, sent to proclaim the message of salvation, and to entreat his fellow sinners to turn from their evil ways, and be reconciled to God, through Christ, we shall at once perceive on what a lofty eminence he stands, and what a deeply responsible position he occupies. So that the aid of the Holy Spirit should be constantly and earnestly invoked in all his ministrations, remembering what a fearful thing it is to rush thoughtlessly, or without due preparation into the presence of God, to speak in His Name.

The *edification* of our people should ever be in our minds, as often as we stand up in the Church of God to address our hearers. A part, and a most important part, of our commission is, to *teach* the people committed to our charge in the things which concern their eternal salvation. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," is the Saviour's solemn injunction to His Apostles just before He left the world. This is absolutely necessary, in order that our people may be well grounded in the truths of Religion, and built up in their most holy faith. This, it is to be feared, is too often lost sight of, and instead of the plain and essential doctrines o

the Gospel, as applicable to daily life and practice, they are sometimes treated to sensational or declamatory addresses, or to crude and ill-prepared discourses; by which they are neither benefited nor instructed. A morbid craving for excitement is thus encouraged, the simple truths of the Gospel become distasteful, and people want continually to hear "some new thing;" and unless their ears are tickled, or their feelings excited, they cease to feel an interest in the Preacher, or probably leave the Church, in order to gratify their taste, or to feed their fancy, in listening to some more fluent or eloquent speaker. Such people make *preaching* the principal object of Divine service; and so they go to Church to *hear*, and not to *pray*—forgetting that to hear is simply to get knowledge, but that to pray is to perform an *act* of Divine worship.

Now, as a remedy for this, and in order to attach our people more loyally and faithfully to the Church, I would here suggest that our preaching should be different from what it commonly is. The Church's system of instruction should be carefully adhered to. All the leading events of our Lord's life should be duly commemorated, and the lessons arising out of them dwelt upon and enforced. The Articles of our Christian faith should be frequently explained; the value and importance of the two holy Sacraments, as channels of Divine grace, clearly and fully pointed out; and obedience to the Commandments of God set forth as the Christian's duty. Our invaluable Book of Com-

mon Prayer, being the best commentary on the Holy Scriptures, may safely be taken as our guide in our pulpit ministrations. In the Articles, and Liturgy, and devotional offices of the Church, her ministers will find valuable hints and suggestions for their discourses, and thus be led to follow that safe and most excellent practice of preaching the Gospel *through the ministrations of the Church.*

By this means, as a late distinguished Bishop of our Church observes, "our people will be brought to some knowledge of the character, the grounds, and the importance of Church communion, of which, it is to be feared, they are, for the most part, greatly ignorant. They may learn to form a due estimate of the value of the Church as an Apostolical and Scriptural Institution; and may constantly communicate with her, after the manner which she herself ordains; not, indeed, by the mere accidental circumstances of birth, or habit, or fashion, or a capricious taste, or an 'itching ear,' drawing them away hither and thither after some favourite preacher, but loving the Church for her own sake, for the sake of themselves, for the sake of her Divine Author and Founder, as the 'Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth,' and as the means whereby they may continue in 'the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship,' in the Sacraments which the Apostles ministered, and in the mode of worship which they celebrated; and may thus be blessed with the spiritual Presence of Him, who pro-

mised that He would be with His apostles, and so with their rightly delegated successors, 'always, even unto the end of the world.' "

In order more fully to carry out this plan of Church teaching, it might be advisable to frame a course of Sermons or Lectures on the *Catechism*, and to take up and explain the several parts of it as opportunity served. This excellent Manual, though brief and easily committed to memory is yet exceedingly comprehensive, and contains, in a short compass, the whole faith and duty of a Christian. It is, in short, a complete body of divinity, and he who thoroughly understands it may be considered no mean Theologian. Besides, it is appointed by the Church to be learned of all her children ; and the lessons thus learned in youth, when more fully expanded, or explained from the Pulpit, will not be easily forgotten, but will be likely, with the Divine blessing, to make a lasting impression, and be taken as a rule of conduct through life. Such a course of teaching will enable our people and especially our youthful members, the better to understand what they hear delivered, from time to time, in the Pulpit. For, as a pious Bishop of our Church—who was himself "a burning and a shining, light"—well observes : "The plainest sermon from the Pulpit, will not be understood, nor profit any one who has not been well instructed in the Church Catechism."

Expositions of various portions of Holy Scripture, a Parable, a Miracle, or a Discourse of our Blessed

Lord, will be found exceedingly profitable, if duly enforced and applied to the various circumstances of the Christian life. The narrative portions of the Old Testament, also, are full of the deepest interest, and abound with lessons of the highest importance.

Sometimes it may be well to take the Epistle or Gospel appointed for the day; and explain its leading points in a clear and forcible way, and apply its lessons to our daily life and practice. This, we know, was the practice of the primitive Church, and continued so for many ages. The Sermon was not then considered everything, as it now is; but was duly subordinated to the other parts of Divine worship, and generally consisted of an elucidation or exposition of some portion of Scripture, which had been previously read in the service of the day. By this means the people were instructed in the knowledge of their duty; and taught and encouraged to put in practice during the week, the holy lessons which they had learned in God's house of prayer.

And, in this respect, we can have no better model for our imitation, than the Epistles of St. Paul. Here we shall find all the great doctrines of the Gospel, fully and clearly set forth, and explained; and all the relative duties arising out of them enforced in the plainest manner. The great Apostle again and again reminds his converts that they have been taken out of a state of nature, and placed in a state of grace and salvation; and urges the greatness of their privileges,

as entailing upon them corresponding vows and obligations, and as a reason why they should walk worthy of their high vocation. He also shows them that the Religion which they profess, should influence their daily life and conduct, in whatever state or condition they might be placed. Thus, the duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects, are dwelt upon, and enforced in the plainest terms, within the capacity of all to understand. This is *practical Christianity*, adapted to the conditions of every day life. But, in modern preaching, it is to be feared, that these relative duties do not occupy that prominence to which, as inculcated in the Bible, they are so justly entitled, and upon the due observance of which, so much of human happiness depends. It is to be feared also, that in rebuking vice, and warning sinners, and exhorting men to repentance, our Congregations are sometimes addressed as if they were *heathens*, and not Christians. For, although it is quite certain, that in every congregation there are some who are walking disorderly; and others, it may be, who are bringing scandal upon the Church, and that holy Religion which they profess, by their wicked and profligate lives; yet we must remember that we are addressing those who are the redeemed children of God, bought with the precious Blood of Christ, and sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. The Prodigal, though fallen and degraded, was still a *son*, and as a

son, was received by his tender and loving Father, upon his repentance. And so it is with the sinner—once made a child of God; once adopted into His family; once numbered among the faithful—now, it may be, fallen into the lowest depths of iniquity by his evil course of life; yet that poor sinner, degraded and fallen as he is, should be addressed as one for whom Christ died; as having been once entitled to all the privileges of the Christian covenant, as a son of God, and an heir of heaven; and, that if he repent, and turn from his evil ways, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, he shall undoubtedly be saved.

In most cases, *Expository Preaching* will, after all, be found the most profitable and beneficial, if enforced in a plain, earnest, and practical manner. Our congregations, in rural parishes more especially, consist partly of emigrants, and partly of the early settlers of the country, and their families, as well as of others who, late in life, may have embraced Church principles, or conformed to the Church's doctrine and teaching. But many of these people have had little or no religious instruction in their early youth; and consequently have but a very imperfect knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, or the claims of the Church upon their allegiance. And every Clergyman who has the care of a country parish or mission, must have been grieved and astonished at the deplorable ignorance of the young persons under his charge, while preparing them for Confirmation, both as regards the Holy Scriptures,

and the elementary truths of religion, as taught in the Church Catechism.

Of how great importance is it, then, that our preaching should be made "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness." Considering the mixed nature of our congregations, and the great diversity of characters we have to deal with, we should study, with God's assistance, to make our Pulpit addresses as plain, direct, and pointed, and as full of practical instruction as the time and our own ability will admit of. All preaching for effect, all self-seeking aims, all desire of public applause, should never be attempted, nor so much as thought of by the Christian minister. His manner should be simple, grave, earnest, and devout, as becomes the ambassador of Christ, who comes before his people with messages from heaven. That sensational, unnatural, stimulating hot-bed process—if I may so term it—should be entirely avoided in the Pulpit, as only calculated to engage the feelings, to excite admiration, but not to convince the understanding, nor to improve the heart. The sober truths, the awful realities of our holy Religion are not to be thus dealt with, but to be set forth in a grave, earnest, and reverential manner, and made level to the capacity of our hearers. Again, all dry and technical disquisitions on metaphysical subjects should be considered as out of place, and not tending to the edification of our people. And so, in like manner, all irritating subjects of controversy, which

only tend to stir up strife, should, except on every rare occasions, be avoided ; and when found to be necessary in defending our doctrines or principles, should be set forth in a spirit of love, and with a due regard to the differing opinions of men on such subjects.

It is greatly to be feared that many persons have been lost to the Church for want of early religious training in her doctrines and worship ; and from want of that plain, practical, and faithful teaching and preaching, in after years, which is so essential to their present and future happiness. Such persons will tell you, that in early life they were members of the Church, having been duly baptized ; but that the *preaching* was so far above their comprehension, that they could not understand it ; and so, not being edified, they ceased to attend the Church's ministrations, and finally connected themselves with some other body of Christians. This shews the great necessity of adapting our discourses, as much as possible, to the capacity of our hearers. For, if the people do not understand what we say, they cannot be edified ; and if not edified, they will soon become weary of attending our ministrations, and grow cold and negligent in their religious duties.

And herein we may see the great value and importance of early religious training in sound Church principles. It is by this means that the youthful members of our Church shall become pious and devout in their lives, and affectionately attached to our doc-

trine and discipline. But if this be neglected, they will have no correct knowledge of what is held and taught by the Church, of which they are members ; and having no settled convictions on the subject of religion, no well defined principles to guide their future course in life, they are likely to become the prey of some wild enthusiasts, or to settle down in a state of general infidelity.

And, moreover, when we consider the increasing prevalence of crime ; the great laxity of morals ; the levity and frivolity, and insatiable love of pleasure ; the giddy round of amusements, so eagerly sought out and followed, more especially by the young ; owing, it is to be feared, in a great measure, to the absence of religious teaching in the Schools of the Country ; we shall see the great need of using all diligence, in our public and private ministrations, to guard our people against these soul destroying evils ; and to make them sober-minded, devout, and holy in their lives and conversation, as God would have them to be, and as the Church has directed that they should be. For this purpose both the Pulpit and the Sunday School may be used with great advantage ; and the members of the Church, thus taught and carefully instructed in their duties and their privileges, will become more affectionately, and intelligently attached to the doctrines and teaching inculcated ; and will, in their turn, endeavour, by God's blessing, to diffuse and disseminate those good and holy principles, which they have

learned from their Pastor, and which have proved so beneficial to themselves.

But, perhaps, it may be thought by some persons that in following the course of instruction here recommended, we are giving undue prominence to Church teaching, and putting the Church in place of Christ in our ministrations. But there will be no danger of committing so fatal an error as this, if we follow the Church as *far as she follows Christ*. When we consider that all the means of grace derive their value and efficacy from the merits of Christ's atonement, and have been appointed by Him for the salvation of His people, we cannot estimate them too highly, nor apply them too faithfully. Without Christ, all our preaching would be in vain; prayer would be useless; the holy Sacraments valueless, mere unmeaning ceremonies, without life, or power, or efficacy, and conveying no grace or benefit to the soul. But by virtue of His precious death and sufferings, His glorious resurrection and ascension, *they* are made the channels through which flow the richest gifts of God to man, preparing us for the enjoyment of His presence in heaven. As well might the glorious orb of day, the material sun in the heavens, be blotted out of existence, as Christ Jesus the Lord be omitted in the preaching and teaching of His ministers. He is the Head, the Church is His Body, we are His members; and as life and nourishment are diffused from the head to the members, so Christ, our living Head, sheds down the

kindly influences of His Holy Spirit upon His faithful people, imparting life, and efficacy, and saving grace to what would otherwise be dead and empty forms.

I cannot better conclude these remarks, than in the words of our late Metropolitan, in his little book entitled "*The Pastoral Office*,"—a book which ought to be carefully read and studied by every Clergyman who has the cure of souls—"Above all, let us prepare each sermon *with an earnest desire that it may accomplish its own special work, and be productive of some special blessing.* Let us aim at the heart, and be content with nothing short of its conviction and improvement. Let us seek to be fully impressed with the awful jeopardy in which souls are placed, and let us leave no effort untried to save them. Each time this solemn resolution should be upon our minds :

"I'll preach as though I ne'er should preach again ;
I'll preach, as dying, unto dying men !"

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